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AUTHOR Hulm, Lee
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ABSTRACT

After discussing with his students the widely reported view of many college students that financial security is their overriding goal, a business professor conducted a survey of the students' opinions on the subject. Of specific interest were: (1) the extent to which students believed their awareness of ethics had been altered; (2) the extent to which classroom experiences influenced future decisions; (3) views on the merits of specific ethics classes versus integrating ethics into regular courses; and (4) the extent to which ethics education could influence participants' development. Students found merit in ethics instruction, and felt that ethics education would influence future decisions. The students favored both specific ethics classes and ethics instruction as a part of regular classes, and they felt that ethics instruction could promote individual development. An education process that focuses on technology but not ethics may produce mechanic, robotic workers, but it will not develop the poets, artists, and philosophers essential to a caring and conscionable society. (SG)

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ETHICS IN THE BUSINESS CURRICULUM? LET'S HEAR FROM THE STUDENTS!

BY

DR. LEE HULM

PROFESSOR OF BUSINESS

CHADRON STATE COLLEGE

CHADRON, NEBRASKA

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

MAILING ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE

BOX 953

HOT SPRINGS, SOUTH DAKOTA 57747

WORK: (308) 432-6289

HOME: (605) 745-6013

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SPEECH FOR PHILADELPHIA
Dr. Lee Hulm
Professor of Business
Chadron State College

ETHICS IN THE BUSINESS CURRICULUM? LET'S HEAR FROM THE STUDENTS!

I'm going to begin this afternoon by sharing with you a number of observations made by Haynes Johnson, Washington Post columnist, in a recent article dealing with attitudes and values shared by today's college and university students.

"MEET MARY, UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE COED AND MEMBER OF THE CYNICAL SOCIETY," Haynes Johnson wrote. "TO LIVE THE WAY I WANT TO LIVE, she said, I HAVE TO LEARN TO PLAY THE GAME, TO FIND MY NITCH IN ORDER TO GET WHAT I WANT OUT OF LIFE . . . SECURITY, NOT SOME FUZZY NOTION OF SECURITY, EITHER--NOT ROSES-AND-MUSIC, PEACE-OF-MIND TYPE OF SECURITY, OR FREEDOM-FROM-FEAR-AND-WANT VERSION OF THE SAME . . . BUT FINANCIAL SECURITY. I COULD HAVE MAJORED IN MUSIC AND BEEN VERY, VERY HAPPY WITH WHAT I WAS DOING, she explained. AT THE SAME TIME I DON'T THINK THAT I EVER COULD HAVE--WELL, SAY I WERE TO GET MARRIED AND HAVE KIDS AND SOMETHING WERE TO HAPPEN, LIKE GETTING DIVORCED, WHICH SEEMS REAL POPULAR THESE DAYS ANYWAY. WHAT IS IT? OVER HALF ARE DIVORCED NOW? I WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO SUPPORT A FAMILY ON WHAT MOST MUSICIANS MAKE."

Mary was one of a group of seniors and graduate students who had been selected by university officials as among the best and brightest of a fine institution, the kind who could help visiting reporters understand what was on the mind of young Americans at the end of the 80's decade. Students were asked for their reaction to the insider trading scandals in which a number of young graduates from the nation's most select colleges have made it materially on Wall Street, only to end up being indicted.

"They seemed largely unconcerned about moral and ethical questions," Haynes Johnson wrote. "Their conversations took on a chilling quality and were filled with a string of spontaneous rationalizations: 'THE END JUSTIFIES THE MEANS! THEY ALL DO IT! DOG EAT DOG! THOSE WHO CAN'T MAKE IT DON'T DESERVE TO! LOSERS

VERSUS WINNERS! IT'S NOT WHAT YOU KNOW BUT WHO YOU KNOW! GET OUT OF MY WAY! I'M NO. 1! CRUSH 'EM! LAW OF THE JUNGLE!'"

"Charity? Compassion? Helping the less fortunate? Public service? The larger purpose of life?" the writer asked.

"IT'S HARDER TO MAKE IT IN THE WORLD," a business major said. "YOU JUST HAVE TO HAVE THAT DRIVE. YOU KNOW, SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST. YOU HAVE TO KNOW MORE PEOPLE TO MAKE IT IN THE BUSINESS WORLD. YOU KNOW, TO PULL THOSE STRINGS. EVEN IF YOU AREN'T THE BEST PERSON FOR THE JOB, YOU MIGHT GET IT ANYWAY. IT'S JUST BY CHANCE. I KNOW SO MANY WHO HAD INTERVIEW AFTER INTERVIEW AND THEY'RE WORKING AT A SPORTS EMPORIUM. AND I KNOW SOMEONE WHO DIDN'T EVEN WORRY ABOUT AN INTERVIEW. HE MET SOMEBODY IN A BAR AND HE STARTED OUT MAKING $28,000 A YEAR."

A liberal arts major, who also is going into business, said: "I WONDER HOW LONG THIS STUFF ON WALL STREET HAS GONE ON BEFORE? I'M NOT SO SURE IT'S MORE DOG-EAT-DOG THAN IT'S EVER BEEN, WHERE YOU TAKE ANYBODY OUT WHO GETS IN YOUR WAY."

"How typical they were, or how aberrational, or even how much they believed what they were saying, I cannot judge," Haynes Johnson wrote. "Yet taking their words alone, one would think they had been taught business philosophy by Ivan Boesky, with ethics coaching from Oliver North and Jim and Tammy Bakker. And this from an era that was supposed to produce a rekindling of American values."

Intrigued by the characterizations presented by Haynes Johnson, I decided to share that article with the juniors and seniors in my business communications classes at Chadron State College in Chadron, Nebraska, a relatively conservative area of the country by most anyone's standards, and an area frequently credited with a population possessing a strong work ethic and a genuine appreciation for traditional, old-fashioned values. I was looking for reassurance that the Washington Post columnist's descriptions were not representative of a larger group apart from the University of Tennessee, including students in my classes.

Unfortunately, that reassurance was not readily forthcoming; and I must confess to being surprised at the lack of surprise expressed by my students at the

observations made by Haynes Johnson. Indeed, if I interpreted their reactions correctly, my students found the attitudes and philosophies expressed by the group at the University of Tennessee to be not far removed from their own and those of their classmates and others value-programming since the mid 1970's--developing into what is often referred to in current literature as the "ME" generation.

I found it difficult to argue the point that there are plenty of reasons for them to be cynical--considering examples like acid rain, the greenhouse effect, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, insider trading scandals, televangelist mockeries, the S & L debacle, greenmail, suicide machines, multi-million dollar salaries for athletes, entitlement programs for almost everybody, 5.8 years' average incarceration for murderers, a soaring national deficit, etc.

That rationale aside, however, I could not help being amazed at the distinct contrast between the values and attitudes college students have apparently acquired and those encouraged by Robert Fulghum in his book, All I Really Need To Know I Learned In Kindergarten, which interestingly, along with three cartoon books, is currently one of the ten most popular on college campuses, according to the Chronicle of Higher Education.

"SHARE EVERYTHING!" Robert Fulghum wrote. "PLAY FAIR! DON'T HIT PEOPLE! PUT THINGS BACK WHERE YOU FOUND THEM! CLEAN UP YOUR OWN MESS! DON'T TAKE THINGS THAT AREN'T YOURS! SAY YOU'RE SORRY WHEN YOU HURT SOMEBODY! WASH YOUR HANDS BEFORE YOU EAT! FLUSH! WARM COOKIES AND MILK ARE GOOD FOR YOU! LIVE A BALANCED LIFE--LEARN SOME AND THINK SOME AND DRAW AND PAINT AND SING AND DANCE AND PLAY EVERY DAY SOME! TAKE A NAP EVERY AFTERNOON! WHEN YOU GO OUT INTO THE WORLD, WATCH OUT FOR TRAFFIC, HOLD HANDS, AND STICK TOGETHER! BE AWARE OF WONDER!"

Well, are today's college and university students not graduates of kindergarten? How is it that the values and attitudes they mirror as 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds are so different from those they were taught at ages four and five? How is it that what they perceive regarding the value of a caring life style that is sensitive to the needs of others is so different from what we would have them

perceive? Indeed, today's college graduates will be tomorrow's social, business and political leaders; and the behavior they model in those vital roles will reflect the extent to which previous generations have succeeded in developing an appreciation for the value of high moral and ethical standards of conduct.

For that reason and because of the number of ethics violations occuring in recent years, the need for instituting special ethics classes in business schools and in business curriculums has become a subject of intense debate--with arguments focused on two particular questions: (1) Is ethics a topic that can be taught and applied effectively, considering that all decisions involve varying facts and circumstances, and (2) should ethics be taught separately or integrated into the content of regular courses in specific disciplines? Regardless of one's personal point-of-view, the fact is that ethics has been made a focal point in education and business circles beyond what could have been imagined only a few years ago.

Regarding the question about whether ethics can be taught, many professionals position themselves solidly against proposals calling for a special focus on ethics, as evidenced by the following quotations: Michael Levin--"ETHICS COURSES ARE POINTLESS EXERCISES"; Gerald Kreyche--"SUCH COURSES OFFER LOOSE GUIDELINES . . . BUT NEVER DO GET INTO THE NITTY GRITTY OF EXISTENTIAL DECISIONS AFFECTING A PARTICULAR SITUATION"; Richard Paul--"WITHOUT SCRUPULOUS CARE, WE DO NO MORE THAN PASS ON TO OUR STUDENTS OUR OWN MORAL INCAPACITIES, MORAL DISTORTIONS, AND CLOSED-MINDEDNESS"; and Eric Hartz--"I PERSONALLY DON'T THINK YOU CAN TEACH ETHICS IN THE CLASSROOM."

Those points are directly contradicted by other professionals, as the following examples demonstrate: Frederick Stow, Jr.--"THE BOTTOM LINE IS TO CREATE THIS SENSE OF AWARENESS THAT MAY NOT HAVE BEEN THERE BEFORE"; James Owens--"SINCE ETHICAL SENSITIVITY HAS BECOME ESSENTIAL TO PRACTICAL BUSINESS SUCCESS, IT MUST BECOME ALSO AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE EDUCATION OF BUSINESS STUDENTS"; Ronni Sandroff--"THERE MUST BE A WAY TO TEACH ETHICS AS SELF-INTEREST RATHER THAN SACRIFICE: TO EMPHASIZE THAT RIGHT ACTION IS THE BEST WAY TO BUILD COMMUNITY VALUES, TRUST, AND

LONG-TERM BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS"; and Laura Duckett--"BECAUSE ETHICAL CONDUCT BY PROFESSIONAL PRACTITIONERS IS SO IMPORTANT, PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS ARE PARTICULARLY CHALLENGED TO INCORPORATE ETHICS INTO THEIR PROGRAMS." The credibility of such statements is perhaps substantiated by the fact that many organizations are "signing up" for ethics classes and employing consultants to assist them in developing specific ethical codes appropriate for their businesses. Also, several states have introduced legislation designed to create ethics commissions which would in effect oversee legislative actions and the administration of state programs.

For individuals attempting to balance the conflicting views regarding both questions previously posed, the exercise becomes frustratingly complex; and one's perspective tends to remain clouded, much as does that of the viewer of the musical drama "The Fiddler on the Roof." There always seems to be a "but on the other hand . . ."

So, consistent with the accepted business philosophy that the user of the product is in the best position to evaluate its effectiveness, I think it appropriate to involve students in assessing the value of ethics education. Since I have frequently included a section on ethics in business communications classes at Chadron State College over the past twenty-two years, and since I taught an Ethics in Business class offered for the first time last semester, I took advantage of the opportunity to survey the latter source for their input.

I was interested in (1) the extent to which students thought their awareness of ethical dimensions and considerations related to human behavior had been altered, (2) the extent to which their future decisions may be influenced through changes in their ethical perspectives brought about by classroom experiences, (3) their personal views concerning the merit of specific classes in ethics versus integrating ethics into regular courses, and (4) the extent to which ethics education can play a role in developing the human potential of participants.

These are typical of the comments received from students regarding the first question:

FROM TIM: "While I was growing up, my parents stressed the difference between right and wrong; so I received a solid foundation of ethical and moral values. Somewhere along the way, however, as I suspect is true of many students, that foundation was covered up . . . and I think I took some steps toward uncovering it."

FROM VONDA: "I have a greater awareness of ethical issues that we all face every day. There are so many things that go on that have an ethical side that I wasn't aware of before. I now realize that what I do can have a big impact on others. I really never gave much thought before to my ethical responsibility to society."

FROM KELLY: "All persons are capable of actions and reactions; but when we don't know the reasons why we do what we do, we only go through the motions. Ethics classes to me are simply a way to make us realize why we think the way we do, helping us to understand ourselves."

AND FROM JOSI: "As a society we have become so "rights" oriented--preoccupied with ensuring that no one takes advantage of us--that we often neglect important moral and ethical questions. Ethics classes effectively remind us of those obligations."

And what of the impact on their future decisions?

FROM DANNY: "While I didn't develop any pat answers, I did consider different ethical perspectives related to certain situations. My future decisions will be influenced positively through changes experienced in this class."

FROM LAURA: "Before this class I used to let a lot of issues slide by without thinking much about them. Now I take the time to consider what effect those issues have not only on me but on others around me. I also approach issues differently; instead of just passing over an issue, I pause to examine the ethical aspects associated with it. I do wonder, however, how much my professors appreciate the change."

FROM PEGGY: "I have learned that my opinion isn't the only one and that others who disagree with me often have reasons just as good as mine. I will be

more likely to consider the views of others in future decisions I make."

FROM CINDY: "Students must be willing to accept new ideas and tolerate others' moral and ethical beliefs. Ethics classes can be of value in helping one to at least relate to others who have different standards and ideas. My future decisions will reflect a broader understanding."

About the value of specific classes in ethics versus integrating ethics education into other classes, students had definite opinions as follows:

FROM ELLEN: "I think ethics should be integrated into other classes, but I don't think that this could equal the value of specific ethics classes. Separate classes focusing on ethics encourage thinking and reflection and in doing so make students aware of their unawareness, which heightens our sensitivity."

FROM JOHN: "Wouldn't it make sense to offer college courses specifically on ethics AND to integrate ethics into other courses . . . AND EVEN for companies to sponsor "refresher" courses every so often to remind people of their moral responsibilities?"

FROM JEFF: "Many of our values are taught to us throughout our lives by our parents and peers, but I also think moral values should be taught in the classroom both in specific ethics classes and integrated into the game plan in other courses."

FROM LEE: "I do not feel it is enough to simply 'toss out' an ethical statement once in a while during regular classroom discussions and then assume that ethics is integrated into instruction."

FROM KOLENE: "I feel strongly that ethics should be a separate class with emphasis placed on moral and ethical issues apart from legal issues. When ethics is integrated into other classes, it tends to take on more of a legal tone . . . and what is legal is not necessarily what is ethical and moral."

AND FROM CINDY: "How can this be an either/or situation? Separate ethics classes ought to be taught to focus on specifics and make one's awareness of ethical situations greater. Ethics must also be integrated into regular classes to make students realize that ethics is not separate from what they are learning but

a part of what they are learning."

And, finally, to what extent is ethics education instrumental in developing the human potential of participants?

FROM JENNIFER: "An ethics class is not only a place to form a personal opinion but also a place to gain from other students. By reviewing ethical issues from many different viewpoints, we learn more about ourselves and hopefully can better balance what's best for us with what's best for society."

FROM LAURA: "Ethics classes can 'fine tune' a person's ethical standards . . . get the ethical engine humming again instead of sputtering along with only a few cylinders firing."

FROM ELLEN: "An ethics class probably won't turn a dishonest person into an honest one, but it will help basically good people to be aware of the traps they can fall into and the consequences they will face if they make bad choices."

FROM ROSE: "Ethics classes can help students to delve into why they feel something is right or wrong. Most students after taking ethics gain the ability to ask themselves, WHY DO I THINK THAT? BELIEVE THAT? DO THAT? Those questions, which may not have been asked before, seem consistent with Socrates' message--'Know thyself and all else will follow as it should.'"

FROM CONNIE: "The purpose of ethics classes should not be to teach students right from wrong but to allow them to reflect about their own values and those of their classmates. If people can be made more aware of their ethical parameters and take the time to consider why they draw the line at the boundaries they do, they will become more aware of their moral responsibilities and contribute more to the society they are a part of."

AND FROM TRICIA: "Without ethics training and the personal investigation it encourages, people are left to mimic the behavior of those already in the business world whose philosophy is IT'S A DOG-EAT-DOG WORLD AND EVERYONE NEEDS TO LOOK OUT FOR NUMBER ONE. That's what today's college students have been shown as role models, and ethics classes might help to change that philosophy."

Tricia's comments bring us back to Haynes Johnson, to Mary and others whom the Washington Post columnist described, to my students who echoed their attitudes and philosophies, and of course to the purpose of my subsequent effort to obtain input from students regarding certain aspects of ethics education.

While researchers may argue that captive audiences often tell us what they think we want to hear, I am inclined to accept the feedback from my students at face value . . . considering that their comments were kept confidential until after final grades were given. I have no reason to believe they were anything but honest with their responses; and while I am going to allow you to draw your own conclusions from their remarks, I'm sure that my personal philosophy reflects student input to a considerable extent.

I do believe that ethics classes can heighten one's awareness of ethical dimensions related to behavior--including common, every-day situations like those that one of my students described: "I usually discuss the day's events in ethics class with my roommate," LeAnn said, "and she then gives me her ideas on the subject. It has almost become a game between us . . . finding the ethical dimensions involved in the other's activities. Whether it is substituting a coupon in the grocery store for something we didn't actually buy, keeping extra change that a clerk returned to us by mistake, or telling our teacher we are sick and then skipping night class to go to a movie, the phrase NOW IS THAT ETHICAL? has become common around our room."

I also believe that ethics education can influence future decisions. It seems to me that if that were not the case, one important belief basic to our entire mental health system--the concept of REHABILITATION in individual or family therapy--would have to be false. I think the evidence is clear that values and attitudes can be changed--not always, of course--but often enough to make the exercise worthwhile. Granted, a specific prescription for right decisions related to future choices may not always be forthcoming . . . but one's frame of reference for the decision could well be broader; and if my students' responses are a valid indication,

one's capacity for empathy for others affected by the decision may well be enhanced.

Like the professionals, I'm not sure my students believe, nor do I, that there is a "one best way" to teach ethics. I agree that a strong case can be made for integrating ethics into instruction in other classes, and I believe as well that an equally strong case can be made for special ethics classes in the curriculum. One way or the other, ethics needs to be addressed. As Sheila said in my class, "This situation is similar to that of an alcoholic whose first step toward recovery is admitting that he or she is an alcoholic and has a problem. By offering special ethics classes, society is admitting that there is a problem and is taking positive steps toward solving it."

Perhaps most intriguing, though, to me, is the role ethics can play in helping to maximize human potential. From my point of view, it's entirely possible that ethics classes can surpass all others in helping us to evaluate our motives; and in a society that is growing increasingly sophisticated and technologically complex, self-examination--careful and intense--may be more important than ever before.

We seem to have entered an age where performance in education means facilitating the learning process in model informational classrooms through the use of a wide assortment of electronic gadgetry--dustless marking boards, ceiling-mounted projectors, videotape and videodisc machines, stereo systems, computer monitors, keyboards, printers, modems, slide digitizers, etc. Educators have become "facilitators" almost gleefully anticipating the arrival of the next technological discovery that will hasten the student's mastery of the subject matter . . . unfortunately unaware that for those who teach and those who are taught, success should be measured more in the manner of the journey than in the time it takes to reach the destination.

Technology, no matter how complex and sophisticated and dramatic in its effect on the lives of every student, cannot replace the strictly human conditions of passion and compassion and vitality and dignity. From my point of view, if a

focus on ethics can stimulate the judicial process of the mind, which indeed I believe it can, to the extent that students are encouraged to improve their understanding of values and ideals . . . to contemplate the consequences associated with choices that will cement the direction of their lives . . . to deal constructively with actual problems they will face along the way . . . to become sensitive, feeling individuals able to empathize with the needs of others less fortunate than they . . . or to develop a vision of the future for the world and the role they see themselves playing in it, it will have been worth the effort.

The great John Steinbeck once said that "man must have <u>feelings</u>, and then <u>words</u>, before he can even come close to thought." Similarly, an education process, caught up in keeping pace with technological change BUT ABSENT a <u>genuine</u> and <u>continued</u> and <u>consistent</u> focus on ethical issues related to behavior, may succeed in producing mechanical and robotic workers--trained, yes; educated, no--but I sincerely doubt that it will develop the poets and artists and philosophers essential to a caring and conscionable society."

Thank you very much!